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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 002881

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [AE](#)  
SUBJECT: UAE DEMOCRATIC REFORM STRATEGY: QUARTERLY PROGRESS  
UPDATE (APRIL-JUNE '06)

REF: A. ABU DHABI 2655  
[1](#)B. ABU DHABI 1327  
[1](#)C. ABU DHABI 16  
[1](#)D. 05 ABU DHABI 4113  
[1](#)E. 05 ABU DHABI 3043  
[1](#)F. 05 ABU DHABI 2173  
[1](#)G. 05 STATE 152818

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Since the April 6 submission of the quarterly UAE Democratic Reform Strategy update (ref B) there has been limited substantive movement in our reform strategy (ref G). Planning for the indirect elections of the Federal National Council (FNC) continues to progress and has sparked an active public debate on the future of the FNC (ref A). In April, members of the Abu Dhabi National Consultative Council attended a National Council of State Legislatures sponsored symposium in Washington D.C.. And in May, the International Republican Institute conducted their first ever program in the UAE--a Women's Campaign School for Gulf women leaders.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary cont.: Although there has been some positive movement in media reform with discussions in June to form the first UAE publishers association, no movement has been made on the draft press freedoms law. Lack of access to either draft legislation or raw statistical data from the census completed in 2005 in addition to complaints from local chambers of commerce that UAEG "consultations" on Free Trade Agreement negotiations are in fact not consultative, illustrate the opacity of UAEG actions. On the positive side, amendments to the Commercial Agencies law increased contract law openness, and progress has been made towards ministerial independence and accountability, with the promise of full financial independence soon. Anti-corruption efforts continued to progress: official investigations into corruption in the Ministry of Labor identified in April over 90 transaction forgeries; continuing investigations were reported in the press. No progress was made on justice reform goals. End Summary.

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Representative Government  
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[1](#)3. (C) On June 26, the UAE Cabinet approved the structure for the Federal National Council (FNC) General Secretariat, in preparation for the indirect elections of the FNC to be held later this year. In conversations with Ambassador, Dr. Anwar Ghargash, Minister of FNC Affairs, and Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak, Minister of Higher Education, emphasized that the FNC indirect elections are not actually an exercise in democracy, but a move towards greater political participation (ref A). Dr. Ghargash also stated that his ministry is preparing for the elections by drafting campaign bylaws and balloting procedures that emphasize procedural transparency. These bylaws and procedures will be implemented by a National Elections Committee that has yet to be formed.

14. (C) Contrary to some reports that there will be FNC seats reserved for women, Ghargash stated that there is no such requirement, but that he anticipates Emirate rulers to use the appointment of the second half of the FNC to ensure diversity and representation in case no women are elected. He did note that the proposed list of electors from the Emirate of Dubai contained the names of over 200 women out of approximately 1,000 names.

15. (C) From April 6-8, four members of the Abu Dhabi National Consultative Council (NCC) attended the Spring Forum of the National Council of State Legislatures' (NCSL) Standing Committees. The head of the Emirati delegation, NCC member Ghaith Al-Ghaith Al-Kubaisi, previously told Emboffs that Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (MbZ) specifically requested NCC participation with NCSL and that he wants the NCC to plan elections for half of its membership following the FNC example.

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Civil Society Development  
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16. (U) In May, a MEPI-sponsored International Republican Institute (IRI) "Women's Campaign School" training session was held in Dubai. Gargash and ForMin Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (AbZ) personally approved this first-ever International Republican Institute (IRI) activity prior to its launch. The program provided five women business and political leaders from the UAE, in addition to women from Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, training in how to develop a message, work with the media to present the message, and to develop a grassroots organization around that message. Sessions were also held on campaign organization, strategy, and finance. Speakers in the conference included

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US Dept. of Transportation Deputy Secretary Maria Cino, and NEA Special Advisor Erin Walsh.

17. (C) Both the English and Arabic language press have covered the indirect elections of the FNC, including a lively public debate about the UAEG's motivation, the future role of the FNC and comment whether a quota for women is desirable. The publication of criticism and speculation about the UAEG suggests a new willingness within the press to pursue a political dialogue other than that initiated by the government.

18. (U) The Dubai Women's College turned its appointed student council into an elected "Student Parliament" and held open elections for its membership in May. These elections are the result of an International Visitor Program-funded effort that Post designed in FY 05. Under this program, six student leaders representing five women's colleges in the Higher Colleges of Technology went to the U.S. to observe student government in action. This program was followed by a MEPI Small Grants Project that brought a group from Mt. Holyoke College to the Dubai Women's College to instruct the appointed student government about characteristics of elected student government, how to run a campaign, how to run meetings, and the role of student government vis--vis the administration. These two programs directly led to a proposal by the students and an agreement with the administration to change the form of student government to a "Student Parliament."

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Media Reform  
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19. (U) In June, the two largest publishers in the UAE, Motivate Publishing and ITP, met to discuss the formation of a UAE publishers association. The publishers announced that their initial focus will be on the issues of circulation audits and transparency. Other leading publishers including those responsible for the major dailies "Al-Khaleej", "Gulf News", and "Khaleej Times" have been invited to join.

¶10. (U) There has been no movement on the draft freedom of the press legislation that the UAE Journalists Association submitted to the Ministry of Information earlier this year.

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Transparency  
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¶11. (C) Transparency continues to be an area of positive, albeit slow, progress. Despite small movements towards openness, UAEG actions remain largely opaque. For example, this spring, during the ongoing U.S./UAE Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, the UAEG reached out to business leaders in each of the emirates' chambers of commerce. However, chamber officials have told us that they feel the UAEG is not really "consulting" with them about the FTA or fully answering their questions, but rather that it is simply informing them of decisions already made. Although the national census was completed several months ago, no results have been published, and the raw data reportedly will not be released at all. And despite repeated requests over the past year for labor related statistics, the UAEG has been unwilling to provide Post with even basic labor statistics.

¶12. (U) In June, President Sheikh Khalifa amended the Commercial Agencies law. These amendments limit agency contracts to a fixed period of time, require mutual consent to renew an agency agreement, allow either party to file for damages, and allows the import of "liberalized goods" without an agent's approval. Minister of Economy Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi told the press that these amendments will boost the competitive economic environment and assure higher quality services. The new law signifies positive movement in the implementation of rule of law and growing openness in contract law.

¶13. (U) In June, UAE Minister for Presidential Affairs, Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, announced that federal ministries would be given full financial and administrative independence in order to achieve the objectives laid out by President Sheikh Khalifa in the national action charter last December. Ministry of Commerce Under Secretary Abdullah Saleh told EconChief that this spring he was allowed to pass over several career civil servants due for promotion, and next year he expects to have the ability to fire underperformers.

¶14. (U) In April, a special investigations committee formed to examine corruption within the Ministry of Labor, discovered forgeries in 90 transactions. The investigations committee is currently pursuing an investigation into these forged transactions, and MoL officials have vowed to discover

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and prosecute all persons involved. This report is particularly noteworthy not only because official corruption is being investigated, but that it is has been publicly reported in the press.

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Justice Reform  
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¶15. (U) There has been no movement on justice reform goals.  
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